

Linda Clair
Ten-day Meditation Retreat
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Transcription from Audio Recordings

FILE 3B – Monday morning discussion

Linda: You going alright with your cold? You're handling it so well.

Question: Yes, I think I'm doing good, staying really neutral. Even if I get carried away into thinking while I'm walking, I'm not beating myself up. It's different – just coming back slowly, and dealing with pain and pleasure. If, when I'm sitting, I'm about to be launched into space or some great experience, I'm still not getting too excited by it – just coming back to the practice. No tips, no tricks, nothing. Not getting overly excited by anything.

Linda: Good.

Question: But it's really good, I feel very grateful to be here.

Linda: Yes, it's amazing that it even happened really. We're very fortunate. They've just closed to border to NSW, so some people who were going to come can't come.

Question: It's been very unsettled for me, so it feels very fortunate to be here for ten days.

Linda: Yes, you never know until it actually starts whether it's going to happen. So good, just keep going. The thing about feeling a bit unwell is that it keeps you in your body. So just stay as steady as you can, keep doing what you're doing.

Question: I'm circling with some thoughts, which are old patterns, and I can recognise them as old. I'm not sure what to do about them. You were talking about being curious yesterday. I'm not sure if that's useful or not.

Linda: I'm not sure if I said curious or interested. Curious is a bit more like you want to know more, whereas interested and watching with interest is slightly different. So all you can do is see it and make that – sometimes it will be a *huge* effort, to detach from it by using your body. There is no easy way and it will keep coming up as long you're curious about it, as long as you're overly interested in it, and involved, and reacting to it emotionally. It feeds on your reactions, even the reaction of, "I don't want this to be happening," is still a reaction and it's still going to, to a degree, feed it. Whatever it is – and it doesn't matter what it is, that's the thing. We think it does matter what it is – "This is important, I need to resolve this, and by thinking about it I will resolve it." But like you said, it just goes round and round in circles. So, treat all your thoughts as equally as you can. They're all about you, all of them. Even if they seem to be about someone else, they're about how *you* feel, how *you* are. So break it, come back

to your body. Use the counting – I haven't talked about the counting this time – that can really help. Particularly the first ten minutes, just to establish that authority, "Okay, I'm here, I'm going to do this, I'm going to keep sitting, I'm not going to put up with this crap." And it's all the mind's crap but you are feeding it, so you have to starve it by coming back to where you are. You're in your body now. Then a new thought will come up – whatever is happening in your life that's exciting or disturbing or something. You'll start thinking about that, you'll never run out of things to think about, and you'll try and justify them – "I need to think about this." Right now you *do not* need to think about anything, nothing at all! But it doesn't mean you won't do that, because it is such a deeply engrained habit, and it keeps you from being in your body. And being in your body, being here, is intense, it's really intense. It can be uncomfortable, intense, but it's actually the most exciting place to be. Much more exciting than any thought you can ever have. Because they are always about something that has already happened to you, in your experience.

So, it's work, whether you're sitting or not. Try not to separate the two, so when you're not sitting you just use that as a time to drift off. Use every bit of time here you can to watch, to be in your body. And it's tiring doing that.

How are you M?

Question: Well, I've been feeling quite cloudy and dense. It may just be a longer retreat and it's still that initial period perhaps. I'm struggling to orient myself to seeing the thinking as clearly as I remember having done. And it feels like I'm feeling around in the dark and getting lost in this dense, dreamy, cloudy place mentally. I'm sort of struggling. Normally if I have a really firm intention I can sort of slice through it to a degree, and it feels hard to do that now. I'm just trying to not expect that to happen and just roll with the punches. But there is a slight feeling of discouragement but trying not to get too drawn into that.

Linda: Yes, try not to expect anything. Every retreat is different so try not to expect it to be – "Last retreat I got into it straight away." It will keep changing. So, like you said, just go with it. Have that intention to be in your body and keep doing that, but don't expect anything. And again, if you're reacting to the cloudy murkiness, going, "This shouldn't be here," that is giving it more strength. And it's one of the hardest things to deal with because you want to be clear, you want to come back, and it's just all murky. And sometimes it's like that. It's just resistance, but it's really difficult when it is like that, so try and just bide your time, do what you can. I'm not saying give up and let it take over completely but try not to fight it, and really watch your reaction when you're wanting it to go away.

Question: Thank you.

Linda: I just keep saying the same thing really, don't I?

Question: I know you do keep saying the same things, but I keep thinking the same thoughts. (Laughter) They don't disappear. But occasionally, when they do disappear, my body always has some pain – it moves around all over the place. There's always something that gives me a feeling that I want to go back into my mind, because that's a bit less painful.

Linda: Well, it might be in the short-term but not in the long-term. I know what you're saying, it feels easier to go into that in a way, and it *is* intense being in your body. Eventually it isn't painful in that way, to just be in your body. I'm not talking about an injury or something like that. But the thing is, like M. was saying, when it's murky – I remember feeling like that – then I'd have a sitting where it would be quite painful and I'd prefer that to the murky, dreamy state that I'd been in. And that, in the end, is what you have to prefer – the intensity of being here. You have to prefer anything rather than being in this half-dead state of dreaminess, emotions, your past. All this stuff that we find secure in a way, because it's the know, but really there is no security in it when you look at it.

Question: Really that is not pleasant either is it?

Linda: It's not at all – it's horrible. So don't feel you're the only one who feels that. As you're coming into your body it can be quite painful and I'd say most people feel it. But what it does do is keep you present. So make that effort to be there. If you feel a bit tired and drift off again, well, that's how it is. It's too intense to sustain for a long time. That's what this is all about – your body becoming accustomed to that energy so that you are able to spend more and more time – it's probably not the right word – timelessness, in your body. It's not comfortable, but you stop looking for that comfort of thinking, being somewhere else, doing something else.

Question: I should change my attitude from trying to run away from it?

Linda: Yes, be brave. Don't run away from it. It's the learned reaction to run away from pain, to get rid of pain, take a painkiller straight away, as soon as you feel pain. I'm not against painkillers, if you've got severe pain, sure. But where does that point start where it becomes unbearable? So, when you do start to feel pain try to stay with it for as long as you can. Thinking is like an anaesthetic.

Question: Yes, before I met you I'd never thought of it that way.

Linda: But it is, and as you start to withdraw from it and it starts to break up you do feel a reaction to it, and you do start to feel this pain that's not all physical pain. Most of it is emotional pain that you've been pushing aside and repressing for most of your life, and it comes up. But if you can stay as grounded in your body as you can it can come up quite safely, rather than all at once.

Question: I can remember when you were talking yesterday to somebody about daydreams and things like that. And I remembered that when I was young I used to have fantastic daydreams. I loved them, and I suppose I laid a very solid foundation for more all my life.

Linda: If you spend your life dreaming like that about what might happen, it never happens – you're just thinking about it.

Question: Oh no, but it's just the fun of dreaming about it. (Laughter) I didn't really expect it to happen. I was just enjoying myself with my imagination.

Linda: We're encouraged, especially when we're young. Or there's something difficult and we want to get away from it, we tend to go into our imagination.

Question: Wasn't such a good thing.

Linda: I always felt I was a bit deficient because my imagination wasn't sophisticated. I didn't seem to imagine stuff a whole lot. I wasn't as attracted to it as much I felt I should be, because kids were told they should have a good imagination.

Question: And now you've realised that it was a virtue.

Linda: It probably was, probably helped.

Question: (Discussion about daydreams, inaudible without microphone, so edited from audio.)
...That's not thinking.

Linda: Yes, it is. What is it?

Question: I would differentiate between thinking – like worrying, or going over the same things again and again and again. But if I'm sitting here dreaming up a story, that I don't think is necessarily going to happen, that is *fun*. Science fiction is fun, writing novels can be fun, can be illuminating. This is not stuff that is happening to me, or I expect to happen, or necessarily want to happen.

Linda: I would say it's still thinking. I'm not saying there is anything wrong with it.

Question: It's still thinking without the detrimental effects of driving you round in circles and not getting anywhere.

Linda: Well, I would disagree with that, because it's not what you're thinking about, it's that movement. Thinking is disguised in many different forms – in visualising, imagination, planning things, all that sort of thing – which you think is necessary, and might feel like fun at the time, but really what it's doing is encouraging more thinking, which does in the end lead to suffering. It's that *movement away*, it's not *what* you're thinking about. And you can't be here and imagine. You can't imagine you're here. You're either here or you're not. If you're imagining something else you're not here. I say it's intense being here, but it's also the best fun I've ever had – much more fun than any thought that I've ever had. Because there has always been, underneath, this knowledge that this is not real, that this is pretend. This is me trying to pretend that something is going to be great, or is great, or was great. Really, all it's doing is taking me away from here.

Question: I just don't seem to get. Probably at this stage I distinguish between... Well, thinking is a word. There's bad thinking, going round in circles and overly worrying about the future and overly thinking about the past, but at some stage I have to plan. I have to plan a trip for example, and I can do that while I'm being in my body and being here without being distracted. So there's a thinking that we

have to use to get by in life. If I stay in my body and not think at all, then I don't do anything. How can I do something?

Linda: Well, I do a lot.

Question: But you're planning.

Linda: I don't think while I plan. I book a plane, I look at the computer, I pick the best flight. It's not sitting there thinking about which flight I'm going to catch, what I'm going to do in the future, it's more pure action, and then it's gone. But that doesn't need to involve thinking. Driving here does not need to involve thinking.

Question: But don't you have to think about which flight would be the best one?

Linda: No, I look! Looking does not necessarily mean thinking. People think it's not possible to function without thinking. That's the crux of the matter – you think, "I won't survive in this body if I don't think, and I won't do anything if I don't think." That's the deepest fear, that "I'm going to die if I stop thinking." That's how powerful the mind is and that's what it does. "I will die if I don't think. I won't be able to move my body, I won't be able to walk, I won't be able to drive, I won't be able to plan."

Question: But how do you come to a decision about which flight to take?

Linda: Often I leave it and it just appears. I look at different options, and sometimes I might talk with someone about it, but that doesn't involve thinking either. All I'm saying is it is possible.

And sure, it is fun in some ways to imagine, but what it leads to eventually is suffering. Because you can't turn it off, you can't say, "I'm going to think about this and not this." It has to be thinking, rather than the thought.

Question: Food for thought.

Linda: No!! (Laughter)

Question: Just following up on that, I've often had that dilemma about thinking. But to me thinking is just that process that generates thoughts that run through your mind. Whereas I suppose what W. was talking about was carrying out a task. So I see a big difference between doing a task, and thinking. They're quite different for me. So booking a plane is a task and it doesn't require thinking. It's a subconscious thing, you're looking at data sets. So we're probably only aware of a small part of what goes on in the mind. Is that what you mean by booking a flight that doesn't involve thinking? It's carrying out a task.

Linda: Yes, and you don't need to think about it. But anything can be a task.

Question: Yes, and going back to the original thing about the imagination and daydreaming. That's the big thing I'm struggling with at the moment. I'm struggling, for about six months, with all of my thoughts are just this daydreaming type stuff. It's very pleasant, very seductive. There's none of the thoughts about, "Why did this happen to me?" or any of those sorts of things, just this really seductive, daydreaming stuff.

Linda: And that's what I mean about them being disguised.

Question: It's so hard. You're trying to pull away from it, and you're back in it, and it's very pleasant.

Linda: The thing is not to judge your thoughts as bad. And I'm not saying that. I'm not saying thinking is bad, or good, or anything. But you're here because no thought has ever completely satisfied you. And you realise that you're living your life in thought. You're not actually here, and you're not satisfied with that. So, what needs to happen is that it needs to become much more attractive being here in your body than thinking. And the more here and grounded you become, the more clearly you see that, and the less tolerant you become of the thoughts, and the less attractive they become – as you're finding. Because it's bothering you, even though it's pleasant, you realise what's happening, that you are still at the mercy of your mind and your thinking.

Question: It's like, a lot of the emotional stuff for me feels like it's sort of gone – there's still stuff there – but it's almost like the mind is throwing in this really pleasant day-dreamy stuff just to hook me back in.

Linda: Yes, it's a very, very deep-seated thing, that is encouraged from when we're very young and we're told it's good to do that. It's very difficult to start to extricate yourself. But when you do have periods of incredible clarity, you realise how second-rate any thought that you have is. And it *is* all from things that you have experienced. You cannot think about something completely unknown. It has to have something to do with something that you have already experienced. So, it's always to do with your personal past.

So no, I'm not saying it's bad. It's up to you what you do, but I'm saying it *is* possible to live without thinking.

Question: I know that, I used to do it at work. A good example for me would be marking complex student assessments, busy working through it, marking five hundred papers, you're busy working through it really fast, but there's no thinking involved, it's subconscious, you're just processing, making decisions through a really complex task. Then all of a sudden thoughts will come in, like, "Gee, I've been wasting my time giving that lecture – no one knows the answers." That's the thought that comes in – everything else is a task. I used to see that very clearly. I'd be motoring through it and all of a sudden these thoughts would come in and I wouldn't be able to mark as fast. And before you know it five minutes have gone past and you're lost in these thoughts about these students – "Why don't they sort themselves out?" – and all that sort of stuff.

[Section of inaudible discussion without microphone deleted from audio.]

Linda: Well, that's what I'm saying. It's possible to book a flight just in pure action, not thinking about it.

[More comments without microphone.]

Linda: And probably what P. is finding – I'm not sure – but you haven't got that structure anymore of work so it's a bit harder to rein it in because you haven't got those times where you have to work. So it's probably making it a bit more difficult.

Question: Yes, it does because the work occupies you, a lot more tasks to do, so there's probably a little bit more time for the thoughts to drag you, there's more space for that to happen.

Linda: M. had something.

Question: (I'm busy with work and things so) I feel I don't have enough time to be in the body.

Linda: Well, maybe you are when you're doing it. And it is possible, as P. was saying, to do that and to make that effort when you're working. You've probably more in your body than you realise when you're working.

Question: But when I try to be in the body it's so hard, and this (work activity) is so easy and pleasurable – it feels like an escape.

Linda: Eventually it is easy and pleasurable. And when you're doing something you really enjoy, that's why you love doing it, because you get lost in it and you are in your body. So, what this practice is all about is being able to feel like that. Eventually it is effortless, you don't have to try to be in your body. What this is about is feeling that whatever you're doing so you don't have to be doing whatever you love most to get that feeling. It's there just naturally forever, that's how you are. That's what's so amazing about this – how you feel is not so dependant on what you're doing. It's not like you're not at all affected – you are – but it's not necessary to keep you in your body because you're just naturally there and that's what this is all about. What you will feel is that feeling of effortlessness and ease, maybe not easy but ease, just being here, being authentic. So most people have something that they love doing that does feel like that and that's why you keep doing it. But this is being about to feel like that whatever you're doing. It's not dependant on that.

Question: Well, for the moment I'm doing it to earn a living.

Linda: Well, that's why you are doing this.